

EPA & Pavillion - Nov. 21 to 26

Date	HeadLine	Outlet
11/23/2012	Facts should be what determines fracking debate	Southern Illinoisan - Online

EPA & Pavillion - Nov. 21 to 26

Facts should be what determines fracking debate Southern Illinoisan - Online

11/23/2012

Facts should be what determines fracking debate

2012-11-23T01:00:00Z Facts should be what determines fracking debate

BY LES WINKELER, The Southern

thesouthern.com

I whole-heartedly agree with Kyna Legner.

Ms. Legner, a field director for Illinois Energy in Depth, wrote a column last week urging that facts be the basis of any discussion regarding hydraulic fracturing.

Her column was brilliantly written. She presented just the right facts to put a benign face on the natural gas extraction industry. However, it was the facts that were omitted that give me, and other fear mongers (her term) pause.

Fact one, she identified Illinois Energy In Depth as a research, education and public outreach campaign focusing on the responsible development of energy resources. Amazingly enough, that organization was launched by the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

I think it would be safe to assume that it is Ms. Legner's job to polish the apple.

Fact two, the column states that fracking has been used for 60 years.

Technically, that's true. My research shows fracking was introduced in 1947.

Unfortunately, it was conveniently omitted that horizontal slickwater fracturing, the controversial technique in question, was only developed in 1998. Since horizontal fracking has only been used for 14 years, it sheds somewhat of a different light on the claim that fracking has been safely deployed 1.2 million times over 60 years.

While somewhat amusing, I'm also a bit concerned about the semantic tapdance industry sources employ regarding the safety of fracking.

Ms. Legner quotes Lisa Jackson, a U.S. EPA administrator, as saying, "In no case have we made a definitive determination that the fracking process has caused chemicals to enter groundwater."

Yet, she fails to note a Duke University study links natural gas development to contaminated water wells. The column also fails to mention the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report this summer that a United States Geological Survey study concluded fracking was responsible for contaminating the drinking water near Pavillion, Wyoming.

But, perhaps Ms. Legner's most egregious use of "facts" was in her description of hydraulic fracking fluid. She described the fluid as 99 percent sand and water. That certainly sounds benign.

One fact I would like to know – what's in the other one percent. No one will tell us. The energy companies claim it is

EPA & Pavillion - Nov. 21 to 26

proprietary information.

You want me to believe it's benign, don't hide behind the proprietary smokescreen.

And, frankly, the 99 percent sand and water argument doesn't stand up to even moderate scrutiny.

Ms. Legner, if we went to a fracking site and removed the sand from the mixture being injected into the ground, would you drink it?

Or, let's look at it this way, if I gave you a glass of water with a splash of gasoline, would you drink it? Hey, it's 99 percent water ...

Finally, let's not forget about the volume of water used in fracking. Three million gallons is about an average amount used each time a well is fracked. Let's use her figures and assume 99 percent of it is nothing more than sand and water.

That means each time a well is fracked 30,000 gallons of other substances are injected into the ground.

One of the chemicals sometimes used in fracking is benzene. According to the Safe Water Drinking Act, the maximum safe level of benzene in drinking water is 5 parts per billion.

One of conclusions Ms. Legner reached was, "It doesn't sound so scary when the whole truth is presented, does it?"

I beg to differ.

And, presenting just the facts you chose ... that smells of whitewash.

LES WINKELER is the outdoors writer for The Southern Illinoisan. Contact him at les.winkeler@thesouthern.com , or call 618-351-5088.

Recommendations